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AUTHOR Hartzog, Carol P.
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ABSTRACT

The Administrative Writing Program developed at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) has served both the administrators and the writing staff that offers it. Using course material that comes from UCLA office files, the program teaches writing as an administrative act, focusing on four topics: the written product, the writing process, types of administrative writing, and the context of writing. The class is conducted as a workshop, centering on writing, analysis, and revision; discussions focus on writing samples or exercises with emphasis on situation, purpose, and effect. During the initial session, administrators are asked to fill out a questionnaire on their administrative responsibilities, the types of writing they do, their primary concerns, and their writing situations. Each week, participants are given a free writing assignment related to class discussions, i.e., how their writing changes for different audiences. Participants are also asked to bring their own writing samples and revisions. Through this workshop, administrators learn to develop self-consciousness and confidence, learning to analyze and control their writing situations. At the same time, their improvement contributes to campus administration and advances the writing program. (HOD)

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The UCLA Writing Program for University Administrators

Carol P. Hartzog

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Carol P. Hartzog, Director
UCLA Writing Programs
371 Kinsey Hall
Los Angeles, California 90024

Delivered at a meeting of the California Association of Faculty in Technical and Professional Writing; University of California, Santa Barbara; March 3, 1983

The UCLA Writing Program for University Administrators

We opened our office at UCLA three years ago to develop a comprehensive writing program serving not just undergraduate and graduate students on campus, but also teachers and students in the local schools—and our own faculty and staff. Executive Vice Chancellor William Schaefer suggested that we should also improve the administrative writing he saw every day: a comprehensive program should address the large population of decision-makers on campus, and its effects should become visible in their writing. Indeed, we should help improve not just the writing assigned in classrooms, but also the writing through which the university conducts its business and acquires its identity.

Clearly, an Administrative Writing Program serves both university administrators and the writing program that offers it. (1) Staff officers who participate become better writers and better administrators, developing self-consciousness and confidence, learning to analyze and control their writing situations. (2) Their improvement contributes to campus administration and, at the same time, advances the writing program. (3) The instructor who teaches these seminars studies both the management process and writing itself. (4) Administrative writing—this particular blend of rhetoric and action—can become the subject of research. Advanced workshops on current writing projects, for example, will expose the writing process, set writing in the context of immediate decision and action, and display the connection between writing and administrative skills.

Briefly, our program has developed in this way: I met with a staff officer in Employee Relations and Development to establish an in-service course for UCLA administrators. The five-week workshop was extremely well-received, so we quickly made it a regular offering. I've taught the course now six times, and two of our Visiting Lecturers have added another five sections. And, naturally, the course itself has created

new demand. By chance, one of the first participants was Executive Assistant to the Director of the Neuro-Psychiatric Institute, and, like any good administrator, she found a way of serving her staff. She asked me to repeat the seminars during three successive quarters for selected NPI administrators. Again, a positive response. Other offices requested special sessions: I taught a one-day workshop for the Offices of Payroll, Finance, and Accounting and two half-day workshops for Administrative Information Services.

Because our writing program has central funding, I have taught these seminars as part of my administrative responsibility, and I have given our Lecturers release time to teach them. Employee Relations and Development lists the class in its in-service training catalog and collects a small fee from each participant's department. For a number of years, Employee Relations and Development has offered an Effective Writing Lab for secretaries and administrative assistants, and recently we have been staffing that course as well. Our administrative assistant, who holds an M.A. in English and has taught college writing courses, now regularly teaches this popular course.

Our administrative writing program is also spreading off campus: administrators, you see, administer. A radiology department head who also enrolled in my very first class asked me to teach a one-day workshop for the Western Hospital Radiology Administrators, which led to a conference presentation for the American Hospital Radiology Administrators. And a brief mention in an Arizona campus paper caused an editor in Wisconsin to call me, requesting two articles for Administrator, a management newsletter for higher education. These articles drew inquiries from the universities in Connecticut, South Carolina, Wisconsin, New York, and Alaska, and community colleges in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Next, I submitted a proposal to the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the reader found the program such a good idea that he called me, then began planning one for his campus, the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. He offered his first class February 9 for the Chancellor and

his cabinet, together with a few deans.

The moral of the story? First, administrators on our campus and others across the country recognize the need for writing courses. Secondly, like most programs, a modest Administrative Writing Program can have far-reaching effects. Third, there is something intriguing about this particular type of writing—administrative writing—and it needs yet to be explored.

Is administrative writing like—or is it in fact identical with—managerial writing? Could we, that is, simply adopt a business writing text from a Graduate School of Management or even an advanced undergraduate program? University business is "real-world" business, yet it is governed in some way by its academic context. In planning and teaching this course, I have both assumed and begun to understand the uniqueness of administrative writing.

Is there an appropriate managerial writing text for such a course? My answer is no, but not simply because this form of management differs from others. In these seminars, I prefer to use no text. I may use or refer to a style manual, and I will certainly recommend handbooks and business writing texts. I have ordered Mary Munter's Guide to Managerial Communication as recommended reading for my spring class. But most of the course material must come directly from the files—chronological files of UCLA's blue memos (addressed to Deans, Directors and Department Chairs) and the individual and office files of those enrolled in the class. So I gather and xerox materials week by week, and I sacrifice some of that beautiful organization that follows from opening up a textbook for each class.

In the class, I teach writing as an administrative act. I organize the class around these four topics: the written product, the writing process, types of administrative writing, and the context of administrative writing. I conduct the class as a workshop, centering in writing, analysis, and revision; discussions focus on writing samples or exercises, with emphasis on situation, purpose, and effect. We consider logical structure

and effective style, with passing reference to relevant grammatical issues.

In our initial session, I ask participants to fill out a questionnaire on their administrative responsibilities, the types of writing they do, their primary concerns, and their writing situations. Each week I assign freewriting on topics related to our discussions: I ask them to assess t' eir work as administrators and to assess their administrative writ'ng, to explain how their writing changes for different audiences, and to consider how they can continue improving their writing when the class has ended. I ask them each week to bring in writing samples and revisions and to xerox at least one piece for class discussion. I supplement these materials with samples and exercises drawn from university files, and to provide models, I also offer revisions of selected pieces and I ask the class to bring in examples of effective writing.

In the class we concentrate on the decisions administrators and writers must make with confidence and self-consciousness, and we trace the clear parallels between administration and writing. Participants generally express confidence in their administrative ability, but uneasiness with their writing. In class they discover that their administrative skill is what qualifies them for doing the writing before them. They need to develop the same control over their writing that they have learned to exercise over situations, and through my class I hope they gain the confidence they need to write as they administer—skillfully and effectively.

Administrative writing highlights and demands control—verbal, rhetorical, professional. Power is always at issue. University officials conducting official business enact daily what we teach our undergraduates: writing is a process of defining, understanding, and negotiating reality. Whether they are establishing a new campus-wide accounting system or inviting Harold Pinter to UCLA as a Regents' Lecturer, these writers must assess and manage their situations skillfully.

The larger question here is that of administrative management. How does management change when it moves onto a campus? First, any staff member anticipates

a certain audience for departmental or campus mailings—an audience obviously academic. Secondly, many administrators themselves have come from academic positions and bring with them that particular training and experience. Is that all? Do we face different motives on campus? What about the profit motive—does it disappear? Is it disguised or subsumed by other aims? Is the aim of the university as a whole "education"? Or is that the business of the students and faculty? How does the university administration support—or modify—that aim?

To answer these questions, I've begun doing some reading on academic administration—to supplement my own experience and observations. I've found that writing on academic administration varies dramatically according to source and purpose. Social scientists, management consultants, and university administrators see the problems differently and address them with different intentions, offering advice, analysis, or consolation as seems appropriate. Yet all see academic management as a distinctive type.

Let me offer two relevant examples: Paul Dressel, professor of university research at Michigan State University and consultant to many colleges and universities, finds that "Higher education is more like the church from which it sprang than [it is like] any other modern social organization."[1] He bases this comparison not on commitment to religious values, but on intangible outcomes, idiosyncratic processes, and dependence on deferred gratitude. Yet he devotes an early chapter to "Morals, Ethics, and Values in Higher Education," and he affirms that values and statements about them play a central role in the activities and public pronouncements of university administrators.[2]

J. Victor Baldridge, David Curtis, George Ecker, and Gary Riley, participants in the Stanford Project on Academic Governance, argue that "the organizational characteristics of academic institutions are so different from other institutions that traditional management theories do not apply to them."[3] One striking shift in tone and content appears within this sophisticated analysis. Academic institutions are distinguished in

these ways:

> Their goals are more ambiguous and diverse. They serve clients instead of processing materials. Their key employees are highly professionalized. They have unclear technologies based more on professional skills than on standard operating procedures. They have "fluid participation" with amateur decision makers who wander in and out of the decision process.[4]

Notice the reference to unqualified or untrained managers drifting in and out of decisions. These managers reappear in very different form later in the book. The emphasis then falls on the fragmentation of the university's professional staffs: administrators are urged to view the faculty as critical to the decision-making process, but not apparently as detrimental to the management process.

The nature and purpose of administration are affected dramatically by connection with the university. I may very well have the chance to observe first-hand the differences betwen university and business management. I will continue offering my campus-wide administrative writing classes, and I am now conducting seminars for our Office of Undergraduate Admissions and Relations with Schools as well. In addition, I'm planning special advanced workshops on particular types of writing—proposals, financial reports, newsletters, performance evaluations, letters of recommendation. At the same time, I'm working with business managers. I've done several workshops for UCLA's Graduate School of Management, and I've worked as a consultant for various firms and individuals in Los Angeles.

Through this work, I hope not only to continue developing effective writing seminars, but also to discover just how administrative or managerial writing is governed by its context. The result should be that writing seminars will gain new value: participants who come to learn something about their writing should learn something important about administration—or management—as well. Ideally, UCLA should develop

a program available both on and off campus, serving the university and the community and reinforcing the links between them.

[1] Administrative Leadership (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), p. 36.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Policy Making and Effective Leadership (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), p. 9.

[4] Ibid.